

Prevention Matters

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services
Office of Women's Health
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Heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the U.S. Certain behaviors and conditions can increase your chances of getting heart disease or worsen the disease once it starts.

By answering the questions below, you can get an idea about your risk for heart disease and take action to improve your health.

1. Age. Have you entered menopause or are you over the age of 55?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Your risk for heart disease increases as you get older, especially if you have entered menopause or if you are over the age of 55 years.

2. Family History. Do you have a father or brother who was diagnosed with heart disease before age 55, or a mother or sister who was diagnosed with heart disease before age 65?

☐ Yes ☐ No

A family history of heart disease is closely linked to your risk of developing heart disease.

3. Cigarette Smoking. Do you smoke?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you smoke, you are at increased risk for heart disease. Even one cigarette per day can increase your risk, but the more cigarettes per day you smoke, the more your risk increases. If you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease can decrease within a year.

4. Diabetes. Have you been told by a doctor that you have diabetes?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Diabetes, an excess of sugar in the blood, can increase your risk for heart disease, blindness, stroke, and kidney failure.

Diabetes can sometimes be without symptoms. However, if you have excessive thirst, weight loss, and frequent urination, you might have symptoms of diabetes. Talk to your doctor to determine whether you should have your blood sugar levels tested. A healthy diet, physical activity, and medications can help prevent or treat diabetes.

5. Hypertension (High Blood Pressure). Have you been told by a doctor that you have high blood pressure?

☐ Yes ☐ No

My blood pressure is: _____ / _____

High pressure in the blood vessels can cause damage to the vessel walls and to the heart. A blood pressure below 120/80 is considered normal. Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure. It is important to know if you have high blood pressure because a healthy diet, physical activity, and medications can help treat high blood pressure and prevent or slow the development of heart disease and its problems.

6. High Cholesterol. Have you been told by a doctor that you have high cholesterol?

☐ Yes ☐ No

My cholesterol levels are:

Total cholesterol _____

LDL (bad cholesterol) _____

HDL (good cholesterol) _____

An excess of cholesterol, a waxy substance in the blood, can lead to clogged arteries and heart disease. Ask your doctor if you need a blood test for cholesterol and if your cholesterol levels are healthy for you. A healthy diet, physical activity, and medications can help prevent or treat high cholesterol.

If you checked "yes" to any of the six questions, you might be at risk for heart disease. The good news is that you can help prevent heart disease through healthy changes in your lifestyle. **If you want to prevent heart disease, you can:**

1. Be Active. Moderate physical activity can help lower your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis. As little as 10 minutes of activity, three times a day, on most days of the week, can be helpful. Walk, dance, or do some other physical activity that you enjoy.

2. Eat Smart. Avoid foods high in fat and salt, and eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grain products high in dietary fiber. A healthy diet and healthy weight can reduce your chance of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and many cancers.

3. Quit Smoking. Smoking is the leading underlying cause of preventable death in the U.S. and a leading risk factor for heart disease. If you currently smoke, talk to your doctor about ways to quit.

4. Get Checked. Talk to your doctor about possible tests, checkups, medications, and other actions that you can take to improve your health. Getting checked regularly can help prevent disease or find it early. When it comes to your health, never be embarrassed to ask questions.

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